

Children & Phlebotomy

Phlebotomy is the medical act of opening a vein, usually by needle, to obtain blood for diagnostic testing. One of the things that any parent dreads is a trip with their child to the laboratory for a blood draw. But it doesn't always have to include crying, screaming and struggling resulting from panic and fear. One key is proper preparation.

What do I mean by preparation? It involves several things. The first is familiarizing your child with what is involved in a phlebotomy. A trip to the laboratory for your own blood draw is a good learning opportunity for your child. For your child to see the steps involved and your reaction to the phlebotomy is very important. Lead by example. It has a significant impact in lessening their fear when it comes time for their own blood draw. The laboratory technologists in the Sams Army Health Clinic will always be happy to allow your child to observe a phlebotomy and explain the step by step procedure.

Another step in preparing your child is to recognize and talk about their fears. The time to do this is not when you are walking through the door to the laboratory. Even if your child is perfectly healthy and happy now, it is always a good idea to prepare for the time when they will need to have this done. You should never tell your child that it's not going to hurt because even a little one knows that simply cannot be true. When I talk with a child about what is going to happen during their blood draw, I try to stress that it will hurt some, but not more than a pinch, and how important it is that they try not to move. I stress how we are using the smallest needle available and how quickly it will all be over. If you would like help in doing this, and have a few spare moments to stop by the clinic laboratory, I will be glad to assist you in talking with your child. Please ask for the laboratory manager or, in my absence, the NCOIC. We are never too busy to help one of our future customers.

The last thing in preparing your child is to make sure they are adequately hydrated. Locating a suitable phlebotomy site can be a challenge on a small child, and it is much more difficult when the child is dehydrated. Sometimes this is unavoidable when they are already ill. But if possible, you should try to make sure that your child is drinking enough fluids prior to their lab visit. It makes locating a vein so much easier and the process go much more quickly and smoothly. Please remember, fasting for a blood test (if directed by the physician) does NOT mean that you stop drinking water.

In closing I would like to say that despite your best efforts to prepare your child, you never really know what is going to happen until we actually perform the phlebotomy. Our laboratory technologists have extensive experience in performing phlebotomies on both adult and pediatric patients, and we make every attempt possible to ensure that the phlebotomy is done quickly and safely. After the phlebotomy is completed, and any screaming has subsided to a few sniffles, it is just as important to praise your child, and reinforce how well they did and how easy it will be the next time.

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